

Freshly Fallen Snow in a Newly Made Silver Bowl

By Shodo Harada Roshi

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Sentient beings are numberless: I vow to liberate them.

Desires are inexhaustible: I vow to put an end to them.

The Dharmas are boundless: I vow to master them.

The Buddha's Way is unsurpassable: I vow to become it.

We are now at the turn of a new century, and the situation in the world is rapidly changing. At this time it is important to look back and see what things it is better not to continue, and to look forward to see what things do need to be continued. The population of the earth is growing into the many billions, and in the very near future there will be as many as 2 billion people in the world who will be starving, without enough food to survive. In addition to those billions of starving people throughout the world, there are also people all around us, nearby us, who are suffering miserably and having a difficult, challenging time. We cannot leave them behind and not give our attention and care to them; we cannot just go someplace to take care of our own personal inner needs.

As the world's population continues to grow rapidly, the number of those who have no food and who are living in desperate conditions will increase even more rapidly. There are so many problems we are facing and having to deal with now: the problem of no food, the problem of no water, the problem of pollution to our planet, and all of the other problems associated with the things that are being done to harm the world's ecology. Above and beyond this, with the population growing at such an incredible pace, the number of people around us, in our own neighborhoods, who are suffering, who are in great need, who are in pain and in conflict is going to continue to grow as well.

For all the people in the world who are suffering and are sick and are going through difficult times, there are many caregivers who have dedicated themselves to helping these people. And there are many people who are volunteers, people who work part-time or full-time in many different ways to help others in need. Yet there are so few caregivers compared to the number of people who need that care that those few have to work long and hard, going from patient to patient with no time for rest or recovery in between. It is a very difficult job to take care of someone. What can be so often felt and seen in these many volunteers who are working so hard and carrying such a great burden of work is their syndrome of burnout. The people who are there to do the job are so many fewer than what's required that they have no time, faced with one person after another needing to be taken care of, to restore their own energy.

Today, with so many people alive in the world, of course there are also many people who are dying. Although there are many hospice workers, anybody who has been involved in the actual doing of that work knows that in spite of all the hopes and the wishes for that work, the number of people who are available to do it are so few that they cannot possibly satisfy the need. And there is little or no support system available for those caregivers. We all have to ask ourselves: What is it that is most important for our mind and for our heart? What is it that we really need? Instead of asking these important questions today, we wait until death is right in front of us; we put these necessary questions aside and just keep on going about our daily business, never really considering them. That mind in pain, that burned-out mind of the caregiver, who is going to help that pain?

There are many different ways for people who have burnout to replenish their inner stores. One of the most frequently used and most helpful is to return to nature, to be in a natural environment. Of course, there are other ways too: listening to music, participating in various sports, even engaging in dangerous, risk-taking activities. These are all things you can do to help restore your own burned-

out inner energy. Yet I feel very strongly that some kind of additional support system is necessary for these burned-out caregivers, some kind of answer to what their hearts and their minds really need, some way of going about giving them the help that will enable them to keep on giving to others.

The Buddha was an actual person who was born twenty-five hundred years ago. But we are not just nostalgic for some person who was born twenty-five hundred years ago. The deep wisdom to which this person was awakened is what we are still learning from today. What the Buddha taught to his disciples, in the first teaching he gave to them in the text called the Dhammapada, was, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon." The second verse that was given in the Dhammapada by the Buddha is, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him." Within these words there is a very precious truth.

This world is not some place that has been created by some absolute being. Neither is it a place that just came about naturally, or through some kind of fate or destiny. We are what we think, having become what we thought. We have this teaching from the Buddha of cause and effect. We ourselves bring about this world; we cannot put the responsibility for our own unhappiness on society, on anything that is external to us. We have always to return within and look to our own wisdom and our own ability to see things clearly. It is from this wisdom that we are able to let go of suffering and help others to let go of their suffering as well. To constantly see within and look forth from this place of wisdom is what we have to do.

There was one among the disciples of the Buddha named Sariputra Sonja; he became a disciple of such great wisdom that it is said that, even if there were a thousand people gathered, all of them put together would not have half the wisdom that this Sariputra Sonja had. One day, before he became a disciple of the Buddha, Sariputra was walking in town. He saw someone coming toward him who was dressed in very poor clothes, but those clothes were very clean and well-kept, and this person's way of walking was very brisk and energetic. Sariputra was struck by the presence of this person. He who was walking there with such a bright, full, abundant spirit was a monk named Asvajit, a disciple of the Buddha. Sariputra stopped him and asked, "Who are you training with to be able to have such huge, abundant energy and yet to be so still inside at the same time?"

When Asvajit was asked who his teacher was and what his teachings were, he replied, "I am training with Shakyamuni Sesson, who was recently deeply awakened. He teaches that all of our Dharma--all the great rules, the great laws--comes from karmic connection. And everything that fades away fades away according to these same karmic connections. It is all empty; there is no substance. Through karmic connections all things come forth and all things fall away, and there is no such thing as some kind of devil or some kind of good person or even an ego. Everything is just moving and changing and revolving according to cause and effect and the karmic connections between them."

Nobody who is reading or hearing these words right now has probably been imagining doing so for the past six months. The fact that you are reading these words is the effect. Something, some chain of events has brought these words to you at exactly this moment. So those events, in whatever form they came, were the cause that through karmic connection led to the result that you are reading or listening to these words right now. I do not think there is anybody who one year ago was planning that at precisely this time and this place you would be reading or listening to exactly these words.

Within our essence we have this place where there are things that are fine if they happen, and fine if they don't happen. And within that, you are at this very moment reading or listening to these words. But if we ask why that is so, there is nothing that can be decided or fixed or planned or said to have created your life so that you came to be reading or listening to these words at precisely this moment. This is the law of cause and effect. There is the result that then becomes in turn the cause, which

with further karmic connections again becomes a result, which again with further karmic connections becomes a cause. This is the way that everything moves in the whole great universe that was begun so many millions of years ago. This same cause and effect led to the creation, a few million years ago, of the Milky Way and then the planet Earth. Earth and all human beings will eventually in the same way that they came forth be destroyed and no longer exist.

Does that mean, then, that everything that was ever begun will be destroyed? It is not like that. Within this great universe, a cause, with karmic connections, again becomes an effect, and the karmic connections again become a cause. Everything is always changing, continually changing, and then again continually changing. There is no fixed substance, nothing that is real in that way. We have many different eras. We have many different things that are happening even on this planet Earth at the same time with the same cause and effect. This process of change is something that is eternal; it has had no beginning and will have no end. This is the way of looking at things from the eye of the Buddha.

It was often asked of the Buddha how these things work. He would always teach this law of cause and effect. This is how everything in the whole universe is affected and ruled. Maybe the closest thing we have today to how the Buddha was teaching about this is science. Within this continuing cause and effect, there is no such thing as an absolute "I," an absolute center, as we consider ourselves. Just as science is teaching that there is no absolute universe that we can find in some shape and form, we likewise cannot find any shape and form for some absolute I, even though we refer to ourselves in that way. Even though we are always feeling that there is an I who is getting irritated, upset, and making people unhappy all the time, where do we find this thing called an absolute I?

We often hear in Buddhism about that wheel of death and birth. In fact, this was already a teaching being given in India before the birth of the Buddha. When we talk about this wheel, what is being referred to is this continuing cycle of cause and effect. This wheel of birth and death, in India in the ancient times, had six different stages that were always following each other in a cycle, repeating themselves. These six worlds or stages were the realm of hell, the realm of the hungry ghosts, the realm of the angry gods, the realm of the animals, the realm of humans, and the realm of the heavenly beings.

We hear especially in Tibetan Buddhism about reincarnation, about the cycle of rebirth, and about these six realms, and we often wonder how this works and what it means. But what I think the Buddha was teaching was that it is only a matter of whether in every single moment we are functioning from that awakened Mind or not functioning from that awakened Mind. This awakened Mind is not something that we must wait until our next life to be able to experience, depending on how we live this life; whether we live every moment from this awakened state of mind or whether we cloud it over is what the Buddha was talking about. It is not taught anywhere in the sutras that we will have a next life; these six realms are not something that we will experience when we are reborn in another life. They could apply to different parts of society; they could apply to different aspects of our current life; they could apply to our various states of mind.

People often think: "I can't believe what this person says"; "I can't trust this person who is sitting next to me"; "I can't believe in this person who lives next door to me"; "I can't really trust that person down the street, I really don't believe what they say"--there is no hell more horrible than not being able to believe in our fellow human beings or even in people whom we know well. And then there are times when, without knowing why, we become irritated and upset and angry, when for no reason at all many kinds of deep, irritated feelings come up and we hurt someone's feelings and make them feel bad, with no control over what we are doing--these are the feelings of the angry guardians. Sometimes, even though we have everything we need, even though we have had enough to eat, we want more, we just have to have more; we're not really hungry, we don't really need anything, we just want more--this kind of greediness is the realm of the hungry ghosts. Sometimes, we do something about which we are just so embarrassed, about which we become so deeply

ashamed, that we are unable to tell anybody about it--this is the world of the animals. Sometimes we truly reflect on and regret the things we have done, reviewing our behavior and working to change ourselves, thinking, "I just really shouldn't have done that" or "I wish I hadn't said that"--this is the world of humans. And sometimes we forget ourselves completely while enjoying the pleasure of music, or sports, or some wonderful pastime in which we are so happy that we become absorbed in it totally--this is the world of heavenly beings.

The realm that is most central for us here is that of humans: we experience this realm when we know shame, when we know a feeling of wanting to better ourselves, when we want to make progress and develop within. We may think that the best way to be born is in the realm of the heavenly beings, but in fact heavenly beings are so busy having a good time satisfying themselves that they are unconcerned with the pain and suffering of the people around them. At the same time, they have no need to review and be concerned with their own behavior. For example, if we were only in the world of heavenly beings, when we heard that there are several billion people on this earth who do not have enough food, or that many billions of people are suffering, we would have no need, no reason, to pay attention to any of these great desperate needs of others. If we cannot realize this great value of being born as a human being and work from there and develop and deepen our consciousness, then we are not making full use of the worth of being born as humans.

One time when the Buddha was walking with his disciple Ananda, he stopped and put a little bit of sand on his fingernail. He said to his disciple, "Ananda, which do you think is greater, the amount of sand I have on my fingernail, or the amount of sand on the whole earth?" And Ananda said, "Well, obviously, there's far more sand on the whole earth than there is on your fingernail." And the Buddha said, "Yes, that's true, and it is the same with the beings that have been able to have birth as a sentient being--they are as many as the grains of sand of the whole earth. While those that have been able to receive human birth are as few as the number of grains of sand on my fingernail."

What the Buddha was talking about here is not just that there is something splendid and wonderful and special about being born as a human. He was talking about the need to understand the true value of being human. With that comes the responsibility not just of being something that is splendid and special, but of understanding the value of all other living things--not just to be able to know that they are there but to know their value and to give that value great life. The Buddha taught how, while being in this birth as a human, we can give life to all of those various possibilities for awakening to our own deep wisdom. And he gave six paths for the doing of that.

First, he said that you must become still and directly perceive all things that exist, from the very smallest, to all humans, to the planet Earth, to the whole universe. You must make your vision wide. We cannot look only at the small, narrow place where we ourselves are, where our small personal self is. We must widen our view to include all things that exist, all of society, all of the people there, everything that is. This is the mind of charity. This is that mind where we take what we have been offered and offer all of it to society. People who live in this state are always giving.

For us to be able to give, whether what we are giving is money, material things, or work, no matter what it is, to help develop things in society by giving--this is what enables us to let go of our own attachments. We are able to see the oneness of all beings in the doing of this. When we feel that we have to defend ourselves, we become tense and our thoughts become rigid, but when we are able to blend in to everyone else and see what is best for everybody, becoming one with them and filling everybody else's needs as well as our own, our mind becomes soft, our thoughts become easy, and we have an abundant and free feeling.

The Buddha said that even if you don't have money or material possessions, you can still give of your pure, bright mind. He listed seven things that can be given even by those without any money or material possessions. The first is kind eyes. It's often said that our eyes speak more than our mouths. If we are feeling difficult in our minds, then our eyes become very sharp and pointed-looking. If we have a clear mind, then our eyes are kind and easy and bright in looking at people and in being looked at. To give kind eyes to someone is free, and it is only up to your own creative

and inventive efforts to find ways to go about doing that.

The second thing that can be given without money or material wealth is a kind, smiling face. You do not need any money or possessions in order to offer someone a kind, smiling face. The third thing is kind words and speech--not to speak to somebody as if you are rejecting them or pushing them aside but to offer kind words, words of support, words of love. Such words are also only up to your own creative and inventive ideas, and they are also free. The fourth is a kind, empathetic mind. When we have a kind, empathetic mind that really sees someone else's state, then all these other things come forth from it. But we have to be able to let go of our own small self-concerns and see clearly the concerns of someone else. That place where empathetic mind is expressed in words and expressions and in the way in which we encounter people, that is what is most important.

The next two are perhaps dated and of a particular context at the time of the Buddha. They are to give your seat and to give your home. These are things to do with kindness, at that time especially, because to give everything you possibly can in these ways is to contact society with kindness. The seventh is giving of your body, which means participating in things like volunteer work by providing your labor, by using your physical efforts to help someone else.

Of course, these are not all separate things. Your eyes, your face, your words, your mind, your body--all of these ways of being kind work as one, and you express being kind through the combination of them all. But of all these things, what is most important is that you do not have any sense left of "what a good thing I've done" or how much you did for someone else, or any remaining speck of self-satisfaction about having offered these things.

For the person who is giving, what is most important is to be able to be very thankful, not with a thought of having given something, but thankful for the chance to be able to move and function and offer and be in a position where it is possible to give something--to be thankful for the fact that you can function and offer whatever it is you give. If we think about that time in a person's life when they need to be taken care of, when they can only take and take without being able to give anything in return, then we see how fortunate we are when we are able to give something. To be able to give something without having any sense of how we have given or that something has been given is what is most important.

Likewise, for those who receive it is most important to be able to receive without any feeling of having been given to, with no trace left behind of how they received or what they received. If you have in the giving of something even one small thought of the fact that you are giving it, then the person who is receiving it bears a deep burden from that. When we are giving we need to, even when we are in the midst of functioning or helping, let go of even the smallest bit of thought of "I am doing this" or "I am doing this for someone." The true mind of charity is that mind that is clear and fresh and clean and empty. The Buddha taught that to let go of ourselves completely, without any sense that we have given or of what we have given, is the basic, true root of charity. This mind of charity is the first path for giving life to our possibilities as humans.

The second path is to align our clarity of mind so that we do not take life unnecessarily, do not steal or own things in a way that is possessive, do not deceive people, do not lie, do not become intoxicated, and do not become misled. In aligning our mind, we have to not hold on to things that have passed, or dream about things that we are afraid are going to come, but always to live clearly and freshly in this present moment.

While we know that we should not hold on to previous things or dream about things to come, we also need in our lives to be able to review our behavior. Reviewing our behavior and planning how to live in the future are techniques of living. These are necessary things for everyone to do; they are not particular to clarity as a state of mind. We have to learn from our behavior, and therefore we have to look into our past. We have to make plans for things to come, and therefore we have to look toward our future. If we do not look at how we are behaving, what we are doing in terms of good and bad, we will not know what we should continue and what we should not do any more. Again,

these are techniques for living; they are not states of our clear Mind, in which we are always in the present moment.

The third path, which is most frequently translated as patience, is not really patience, nor is it endurance or humility, as it is otherwise translated. Rather, the meaning is to receive everything exactly as it is, exactly as it comes. When we are told that we are about to die, when death is imminent, there are many emotions that we go through. The first one is that we do not want to believe it. The second one might be to become angry and even violent through not accepting it. And then we might try making a deal with God. And if this deal with God goes well, the state of mind we are able to realize is that state of mind of becoming completely accepting, of knowing something exactly as it is, facing it, taking it, and seeing clearly what is going on.

In fact, this is our basic and true nature. When we are born into this world we don't enter it saying, "I would prefer to be born to this house" or "I prefer to be living in this way." When we are born we are all born exactly equal as babies. And we are accepting of everything that comes, not choosing and deciding how we want to be and how everything is going to go. Everything is equal and the same for each person at that time.

The fourth path is that of thorough efforts. How often we make efforts for a little while, and then when it gets too hard, instead of continuing we retreat and let go in the middle, giving up. Our efforts need to be until what we set out to do is fully actualized. It is like a teapot of water that you put on to boil. If you keep taking the pot off the heat before the water has reached the point of boiling, because you don't feel like keeping going with it, it will never get to a boil. If you put it on for a little while, take it off, put it on for a little while longer, and then take it off again, it will never get to the boiling point. When you are going to do something, you need to do it to the point where it is actualized and truly done.

The fifth and most important of all six of these teachings is that of samadhi, or deep quiet. The most important thing for us to be able to live well in this world is to know that stillness, that serenity of the quiet mind. In order to be able to see clearly, to know how to make the best decisions and how to function in the best possible way, we need to know a quiet place, that still mind.

The way to realize this quiet mind was taught to us in an excellent rule of Bodhidharma, who said to let go of all things, to cut all connections to things external to ourselves, and to let go of all concerns with things within our mind. To cut off all connections with the outside world does not mean to separate ourselves from everything--we cannot leave all physical things or all external things behind; we cannot live without having contact with things. What it does mean is that the problem arises when we become caught by and attached to everything we see or everything we hear. Because we do this all the time, we are not able to know that quiet place.

When we are caught and trapped by things, we lose track of our clear, pure nature. And at the same time within our minds we have so many varieties of thoughts: Is this right? Is this wrong? How should we do this? Should we do that? We judge what is good. We judge what is bad. All of these things are always going on, going around and around inside us. Yet, at the same time, we get to thinking that we are not to think anything. This isn't right either; if we didn't have thoughts, we couldn't do anything. We have to be able to make plans and observe schedules in order to function well in society. But the actual essence of being alive is what is happening at this very moment, in each moment, in each moment, in each moment, in each place, in each place, and in each place. To still have things around us, to still have thoughts going on within us, but at the same time not to be caught or attracted to any of it--this is what we need to do.

And we ask in wonder, how can you do such a paradoxical and contradictory thing as to see and then not be caught by what you see? As to hear and not be caught by what you hear? As to have thoughts and not be caught by them? It is a very mysterious thing, but it can be done, and how it is done is through zazen. People often think of the idea of zazen and think of the form of a person sitting in meditation. In fact, that sitting posture is just the doing of zazen in a greenhouse. That is

the form of it, the posture of it, but it is not the essence of it.

Doing zazen is while having a body to forget one's body completely. People are doing this all the time in their daily lives. We could not function in our daily lives if we were thinking about things all the time. When you wake up in the morning and eat breakfast and go to work, you are not thinking about every single detail of what you are doing. Of course, if you're going to a job for the first time, you're considering how to go about doing it, but when you wake up and go to brush your teeth, do you have to think about how to go about brushing your teeth? What if every time you wanted to wash your face you had to first imagine whether to move the washcloth or to move your face? When you're eating you're not trying to figure out how to go about lifting the spoon or how to go about lifting the chopsticks. And when you're walking you're not thinking, "Is it my left foot that is going to go first or my right foot that is going to go first?" We do things in our daily lives all the time without thinking about how we do them--we do many, many things, naturally and spontaneously. This way of doing things without thinking about them is what zazen means.

We all have the capability of taking on new experiences and putting them within our way of doing things without having to think each time about whether something is a new experience or having to figure out again and again how we are supposed to go about doing each thing. That living energy is something that is always changing, always growing, always moving, not something that we have to stop and hesitate and consider in every moment of action. It is when our mind stops short and hesitates that all kinds of extraneous thinking, all kinds of delusions and confusions, can enter.

There is a story from old China about the man with the longest beard in the history of the country. His beard was so long, and he became so famous, that the emperor called the man to court so that he could see this very long beard for himself. So the man went, and the emperor said, "That truly is a great beard. I've never seen a beard so long. No wonder it is so famous. But could you tell me something? When you sleep, do you put that beard under your blankets or over your blankets?" And the man with the beard became very confused. He had never thought about what he did with his beard when he slept, but he didn't want to lie to the emperor by telling him something that wasn't true. He thought about it: did he put his beard over the blankets or under the blankets? He just could not figure it out. So he said to the emperor: "You know, I really must not lie to you. I cannot remember if I sleep with my beard over the blankets or under the blankets. I'll have to go home and find out." And that night when he went to bed he tried putting the beard over the blankets, but it seemed to be tugging uncomfortably; he tried putting it under the blankets, but he felt suffocated by it. He was up all night long trying to figure out whether he had always slept with his beard over the blankets or under the blankets.

When we suddenly stop and try to figure out how we do things, when we become self-consciously aware of them, then we hesitate, and things are unable to flow; we stop their natural flow. To be able to move forward without being self-consciously aware of the things we are doing is what it means to be in deep samadhi. When people hear the words deep samadhi they always think that they refer to some kind of very still, quiet, unmoving state of mind that has no activity in it. In fact, what we are talking about here in this fifth teaching is that stillness which is in the midst of activity.

Finally, the sixth of these teachings by the Buddha is that when we are able to know that quiet, still mind, then our wisdom, our true, pure wisdom will be born. Wisdom and knowledge are two very different things. Wisdom is that with which we are born, while knowledge is something we acquire later. When we are using them, depending on which we are using, they have very different results. One way of putting it is that the vessel that holds knowledge is the vessel of wisdom. If we absolutely have wisdom, if we actually are expressing our wisdom, then there is no way that we can mistakenly make use of our knowledge. Wisdom arises when our eyes can see correctly, when our ears can hear correctly, and when we can use our bodies correctly. And what it means to do these things correctly is to do them without any sense of ego, without any filter of a small self or an egoistic you.

When we are making efforts to express ourselves, when we put a lot of ego into what we are doing

and saying, it is impossible for our wisdom to come forth. When we become quiet in our mind and thus can see clearly, or hear clearly, then our wisdom can come forth. When we are able to see without preconceived ideas about things, without various filters, but to see with clarified eyes and hear with clarified ears, when we are using our senses in a clear way, then we can see what is true and our wisdom can come forth.

But among these six basic paths, the most important is that of deep samadhi, the deep, quiet mind. In this state of mind where we are quiet, then we naturally can see with a clear eye what is necessary, and from that quiet mind we spontaneously are able to give. We are able to align our mind well when it is quiet because when it is quiet it becomes aligned naturally. We are able to receive everything exactly as it is because in our quiet mind we are not resisting things, we are able to receive them clearly. So it is in this quiet mind that we are able to observe all of these various ways of being and these kinds of wisdom.

And to be living in this state of mind, with these various forms of expression, is what is called compassion in Buddhism. What it means to be able to volunteer and help people is to be compassionate. This word compassion is a very important word to understand clearly. In Buddhism the word love is not frequently used, because love can so easily be misinterpreted as a personal love--even an egoistic love--as opposed to a love for all beings. For that reason, the word that is popularly used in Buddhism is this word compassion. What this word means is that we put our entire life into what we do, that we throw ourselves away completely in the doing of what we are doing.

The word for compassion in Japanese has two parts. The first part of it means to give joy, to give the joy of living to all beings, to offer someone the possibility of realizing this joy of living. The second part of it means to take away the suffering of all beings, to take away their suffering completely so that they can know that joy of being alive. To give joy to everyone, to bring everyone joy that they can know, is the job of compassion. And to take away the suffering that prevents that joy from being known is the other half of it, the other face of it. What it is called when we give our life to the awakening of this deep mind of compassion, one name for it, is to awaken our Bodhisattva spirit. To help everyone realize the joy of being alive is what the word compassion means. And we vow to have to do this. Unless we are able to do this, there is no way that we will be able to bring liberation to all of the many people suffering in the world.

The manifestation of compassion that we are familiar with in Buddhism is that of Kwan Yin or Avalokiteshvara or Kannon. In understanding true compassion we have in our own time the amazing, miraculous example of Mother Theresa, who not only gave everything she had but in fact gave her whole life to caring for others. She is such an exemplary figure for us--someone who gave every single bit of her life, offering it up to society in order to care for others.

A year before her death Mother Theresa wrote a letter protesting the planned execution of Frankie Parker in the state of Arkansas. Unfortunately, those many letters written protesting his execution were not successful. But she had a great influence at that time by writing a letter on his behalf. Even though Frankie Parker was a person who had been convicted of murder and was scheduled to be executed, he, like everyone else who commits a crime, was also the child of a mother somewhere. To enable people to see the preciousness of this one person's human life, many letters were written; many people protested this execution, yet those voices were not heard, and he was still executed.

It could be said that everyone who ends up committing a crime as Frankie Parker did has met with bad circumstances; they have in their life had bad conditions. If any of us were to be in the same circumstances, for us to act in exactly the same way is possible. Each one of us could become someone who would kill another human being and also have to be executed. As the Buddha said, it is a very precious thing to have been given the gift of human life. Yet even though we have been given this precious gift of human life, sometimes we meet with circumstances in a particular human life that can even lead to us having to be executed. The Buddha, seeing through this, said, "It is a life of suffering to have the life of a human being." All humans suffer. He saw through this well.

If we are someone who has experienced a lot of suffering, how very thankful we are for someone's kind words, for someone's warm heart. Someone who hasn't experienced a lot of suffering does not know the deep gratitude that can be felt for such simple gestures as a kind word or a kind smile. In the very first Dharma talk the Buddha ever gave, he taught that this world is suffering--as it is, to be in this world is to experience a life of suffering. The Buddha taught us that there are four great sufferings in life: to be born, to be sick, to get old, and to die. If we see life as suffering, then whatever comes to us during our life that is not suffering we can accept as great happiness. But if we decide at the beginning that life should be only happiness, our suffering will be even greater when it comes.

If we could actually say or know that we would live an entire lifetime without ever becoming ill or having the people around us become ill, that would be wonderful. But that's not how it is. We do get sick. The people we care for also become sick. As we get old, our body doesn't always do what we want it to do, our life doesn't always go as we wish it would; when we try to get along with people of the younger generations, the gears don't mesh so well. Many things that make us unhappy and are difficult come to us as we get older in life. And that pain and challenge and difficulty of dying--no matter how we try, there's no way to avoid that; we all will have to experience it in this lifetime.

All of this is great suffering. It has to be looked at straightforwardly. This is how our life is. If we are living a life, this is what also comes. And what is the cause of this pain and suffering? It is because we gather and collect and are attached to many things, many people, many possessions, much money--we are constantly wanting to collect and gather and hold onto and keep and possess. Within the many kinds of suffering there is one that involves having to separate from someone we love. No matter how much we love someone, no matter how dear they are to us, the time will come when we will have to separate from them. And there are also people who, although they are difficult or challenging or cause conflict, we end up having to be with all the time. And then there is the difficulty of trying and trying for something, really searching and seeking for it, but still not being able to attain it.

And then there are things that if we just hadn't seen them, or we just hadn't heard about them, or we just didn't know about them, we wouldn't have had to suffer. But we did see them, we did hear about them, we did know about them. In verse sixty-three of the Dhammapada the Buddha gave us the teaching that "The fool who knows his foolishness is wise at least so far. But a fool who thinks himself wise, he is called a fool indeed." There was one philosopher who said that the deepest philosophy of any person is to know that human beings don't know anything. And scientists as well say that no matter how much they understand and research and realize, there are still many, many things that they cannot realize and still do not know anything about.

In the teachings of the Buddha there are many thousands of sutras with millions of words written there, and it could take you the rest of your lifetime to read all of them. There was someone who read all of them four times and said there was nothing there that can be called the truth, that can tell us exactly what is really happening. In the sixth-sixth stanza of the Dhammapada it says, "Fools of little understanding are their own greatest enemies, for they do evil deeds which must bear bitter fruits." Humans are worse than poisonous snakes or wild animals or crazy gangs. Even the most poisonous snake or the wildest animal would never do something like putting human beings into oppressive prison cells and executing them. The Dhammapada continues that it is because we are so centered on ourselves, because we love our small selves so much, that human beings become like that. For Frankie Parker as well it was because of this self-centered concern that he did those things that cut off his rights as a human being. It was through his own behavior, even knowing what the results of it would be in our society, that those things happened. The Buddha said that in our hearts we have places like poisonous snakes, like wild animals, and like crazy gangs. In our own hearts we all have these places.

The third of these great four teachings--the first being that all human beings have a life of suffering; the second being that we have that suffering because we gather and accumulate and possess--is that

to liberate ourselves from that suffering we have to let go of all of those extraneous thoughts and ideas and opinions of things that we hold so dear. To let go of all of those things, all of those thoughts and ideas, is the only way to gain liberation from suffering.

The fourth of these four basic truths is a teaching called the Eightfold Path, in which the Buddha taught how we can liberate ourselves from this deep suffering. When the Buddha gave this teaching, there were several monks who decided that in order to give life to and realize this teaching of the Buddha, they would have to leave society. They felt that they could not do it within society, so they went to live in an isolated place to follow his ways of teaching. At the same time, there were many who wanted to be able to do the same but could not leave their houses, they could not leave their families and their jobs, so they asked, "How is it possible? How can we go about realizing this true and actual happiness, this true deeper happiness while living in society"?

On the morning of December 8, the Buddha when he saw the morning star was deeply awakened to his True Nature and had a deep enlightenment experience. At that time he said, "How wondrous! How wondrous! This bright clear Mind to which I have just been awakened--every single living being is endowed with this same bright, clear Mind." Everyone has this same Mind. There is no exception. But, because people are so full of extraneous thinking, so full of extraneous ideas and desires, they are not able to realize this clarity of mind, the deep, bright Mind, even though there is not one single person who has not always had it from the origin.

That which every single being is endowed with is what I am talking about. It is often called Buddha Nature. Another name for the Buddha Nature with which all beings are endowed, this clear nature, this clarified nature, is the great compassionate mind. This great compassionate mind is something that every single person already has. But because it is covered over with so much extraneous thinking, it is not always apparent and accessible.

To realize this true mind of compassion, the Buddha first had to pierce through that mind of ego. It is impossible, of course, for us to live our everyday life without our ego. The point is not to get rid of it. But unless we pierce through and go beyond the ego, we cannot realize this true mind of great compassion. The person who first awakened to that and taught us about it is the Buddha. If we can just once pierce through and go beyond that place where the ego is controlling us or where we are so attached to the ego, what we find is a mind of great serenity, great stillness, and great compassion.

First we need to believe that this clarified tool, original Mind, is the mind of compassion. And then, through these six paths that we have talked about, these six ways of expressing our wisdom as human beings, we can take this clarified mind and put it to use in our lives so that we can behave in that way, from that wisdom, with that compassion. When we have the deep realization that all beings in society are ourselves, that everything is just one unified whole, with that will come naturally a state of mind of being compassionate. And as we live in that deep compassion, which we need to believe in and have faith in, as we live from that point of deep compassion, things that happen and that we see will give us proof for that belief, and we will know how that mind of compassion works in this world in which we are all one.

That great, still mind of compassion is often explained in terms of the metaphor of a mirror, as a mirror-like transparency or clarity of mind. This does not mean that we have some kind of a mirror in our mind; rather, it is that our mind in its quality of clarity is just like a mirror. A mirror reflects everything exactly as it is, perfectly, because it does not have any choices of liking and disliking. It does not have any opinions; it does not have any special feelings about things. Because it does not have any egoistic clutter, it can reflect things exactly as it sees them, with complete clarity.

A mountain is reflected in the mirror as something that is tall and high, and a river is reflected as something that is low and flowing. At the same time a mirror also reflects each and every thing just as each individual thing is. Someone who is sick is reflected exactly as a sick person. A man is a man; a woman is a woman. All people are reflected exactly as they are without any modifications

because nothing is being held onto by the mirror.

The mirror's ability to reflect is always the same, yet those things that it is reflecting are not the same; a mountain, a river, a sick person, or a healthy person is each reflected exactly as it is. But we are not just like that mirror. We have a function. We are able, while seeing things exactly as they are, to lend a hand, to put out our energy. If we see someone who needs a helping hand, we can put our hand out right away. We are able, while reflecting people exactly as we see them, also to extend our energy and act from that place of seeing them exactly as they are.

In our mirror-like mind, all of us have these four varieties of wisdom. We are endowed with them from the origin. One of these four kinds of wisdom is that our mind is mirror-like. The second is that we see everything equally. The third is that we see everything exactly as it is. And the fourth is that we are able to function according to each and every thing that we see. However, while every single person is endowed with these four wisdoms, because we have egoistic points of view--we think, "I want to do this, but I don't want to do that"; "I like this, but I don't like that"--because we clutter up our minds with those points of view, we are unable to use all of these four kinds of wisdom.

In order to use this mind of compassion to its fullest capacity, we need to bring forth that true spirit of the Bodhisattva. To do that we have to let go of that heaviness, let go of those burdens of the small self, of the ego; we need to give everything up, give it up for society, in order to give society all of our bright light. And what that mind of compassion, that spirit of the Bodhisattva, says is that even if I have not been liberated yet, I will do everything I possibly can to liberate those in society. Thus the first thing we have to do is throw ourselves away completely and give everything to society that we possibly can. To vow that we will do whatever we can in that way is the vow of the Bodhisattva, the spirit of the Bodhisattva.

With just the raising of this vow, the way in which we are going to live our whole life is already decided. What we do and how we live the life we are living are permeated by this vow. In this way, it is taught that just raising this vow is the same as already realizing deep enlightenment. When we are committed to this vow, it is the same as having the experience of deep enlightenment. It can be compared to getting on a ferry. When you get on a ferry, unless for some very unusual reason the ferry gets lost, then you are going to reach the other shore. When you make this deep vow, then without fail you will realize the ultimate goal. The making of the vow is the same thing as the realization of the goal. But the people who never get on the ferry will never get to the other side.

There is a very important teaching hidden here. With just that deeply committed vow, the full way of our life is decided. All of us like to be respected and loved and given lots of attention. Everybody likes that a lot. When things are going the way we like, we are all very easy with everything, and everything in our lives seems to be just fine. When we encounter people who are prejudiced against us, who insult us, who do things we dislike and treat us badly, then how difficult things become. But if the direction of our life is set, if our vow is deeply made, even when those things happen to us, we have a way to move through them. When we have a deep, firmly determined vow, it gives us a center point that enables us to move through those things that are unpleasant and usually difficult to handle. When we make such a vow we have fewer delusions and less confusion. We know what to do when we are with people, and no matter what happens to us, the way to move through it is shown to us by how this vow needs to be kept.

But first we have to give rise to this vow of the Bodhisattva spirit. And maintaining this vow may be far easier for someone who has been on this path for a long time, working for many years toward clarifying their mind and being able to practice toward the realization of that vow. For a person who is just deciding, "I'm going to give rise to a Bodhisattva vow," it is not always so easy. Just because they have given rise to the desire for that vow, it does not mean that things will happen so simply. Somebody who has just been given their driver's license might say, "I have my license, and I'm not going to have any accidents now." But when they go downtown where the traffic is so heavy and everything is so busy and all the cars are coming at them and turning every which way, they don't

know what to do. Just because they have a license now, it does not mean they are not going to have any accidents. In the same way, just because we have decided to make the Bodhisattva vow, just because we know we should be doing it, that does not mean we are not going to have great disappointments and backslidings and have a hard time doing it. That is a part of it, and we have to work through that. And we can because we have this vow.

To help us be able to observe and live in terms of this Bodhisattva vow, we need to learn how to align our mind. For doing this, the Buddha has taught us how to let go of all of these extraneous thoughts and all of these various delusive ideas we are always holding onto. For being able to live in this vow of the Bodhisattva, we need to practice in a way in which we can maintain the alignment of our clear mind. To be able to practice, to apply ourselves to maintaining that clear mind, is also a very important part of this vow. People say very simply to do zazen, but for doing zazen we have to first align our physical body, then align our breathing, and finally align our state of mind. All three of these things have to be aligned and unified for it to be zazen.

What it means to align your body is to use your body correctly. What it means to use your body correctly is to maintain your balance and keep a full, taut feeling in the lower half of your body, while keeping the top half of your body very light and easy. Even if we do nothing but stand up, our ki wants to rise also. So in order to live in the healthiest, most correct way, we need to be always practicing so that our ki is kept low and balanced. One of the main points of aligning your posture correctly in zazen is to feel that great pulse that moves from the bottoms of your feet, up your spine, and out the top of your head. We align our bodies in zazen by feeling the flow of the ki. What it means to straighten your back--for people who have a little bend in their back it doesn't mean to be only physically straight--is to sit so that the energy can go right up your spine in a straight way. When you can sit like that, the flow of your ki is free and unburdened, and that is what we mean when we talk about the proper alignment for the doing of zazen.

After we have our posture aligned, we next have to align our breathing. The way we align our breathing is by breathing so that we exhale completely and keep our center low. In everyday life especially, we can use this breathing in our work and in our other activities to keep ourselves settled and to keep our balance low. We have to learn to breathe in such a way that we keep our ki low, exhaling completely and inhaling naturally. First we exhale completely, all the way to the very final point of the exhalation, all the way down to the very bottoms of our feet. Then we let the inhalation happen naturally. Each day we should do this kind of exhalation many times, making the breath fully extended and bringing our ki down completely.

When we breathe in this way, we will naturally use the best posture for the doing of that. We had a famous pianist named Alexis Weissenberg who came and performed for us in the hondo, the great hall, at Sogenji--he even brought his own piano. He was sitting with such a straight back at the piano that I asked him, "Were you taught that posture when you were learning to play the piano, and do you teach it when you are teaching your students to play the piano?" He said no, that he had not been taught to sit with his back so straight. Everybody loves music; there are very few who do not like music. But those who are especially gifted at it, those who will be able to play music as their life's work, will discover for themselves what their best posture is for playing. If you try to tell them, "You should use this posture" or "You should use that posture," they will just become resistant, and that resistance will get in the way of their being able to play well. When people are doing what they want most to do, with everything they have, then the most appropriate posture will naturally come out of their wanting to do whatever that is in the best possible way. When we are doing what we most want to do, no matter what it is, then our posture is always the correct posture for that thing which needs to be done. This is true of zazen as well.

In the same way, when we are doing something that we really want to be doing, that we really love to do, then our breath naturally becomes aligned in the doing of that thing. We do many, many things in our lives; when we are working from this true place of essence, when we love what we are doing, our posture and our breath will naturally be aligned in the doing of that. Again, it is the same

with zazen. As human beings we always have everything that we already need; it is already within us.

Because I am always talking to people and showing them how to do zazen and teaching the way of zazen, naturally the way of breathing I have described has become what I do. In fact, I have never been taught about breathing, or learned how to do it from someone else. Because it was necessary, I learned how to do it myself. The zazen breathing is not something that you can be forced to do or learn to do by imitating what someone else does; you learn it because you need to do it to do zazen. That mind of zazen, that aligned mind of zazen, is the same as when you want to do something for someone, and without thinking you just do it, spontaneously, with no thought of a reward or of a self doing it. But because it is hard to know what it means to do zazen this naturally and this spontaneously, I give these pointers and guide people as I do in the way to do zazen.

When you do this breath, when you exhale completely, then suddenly your head becomes crisp and clear, fresh and renewed. With just that one complete exhalation you can think in a fresh way and your whole body becomes refreshed. As it says in the Dhammapada, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought." When our mind is clarified and pure, then everywhere we are is clarified and pure in the same way that a shadow follows behind an object. In this way what it means to be clarified and pure is to be that mind which is free from any extra clutter. When we breathe out, exhaling completely, and align our posture and breathing, then we are able to let go of all of this clutter. That is what it means to be able to live in this clarified state of mind, in this great joy of the clear Mind.

We are always thinking, "Oh, I should have done it that way," "Oh, it should be done this way," "Oh, I have to do it this way." We are always thinking about so many shoulds and coulds and about what had to be done that we didn't do. Our heads are full like that all the time. But when we exhale completely, we can let go of all of that. When we go on with those thoughts over and over again, we become impatient and frustrated and irritated; but just by exhaling completely we can let go of all of those things and return to our clarity of fresh mind. This deep breathing enables us to see that from the origin there has been nothing to be caught by, nothing to be stuck on whatsoever, not even once.

The mind of true compassion is a way of being. To be able to realize this place where it is not your ego that is functioning all the time, but where you have gone beyond that small-thinking process, is to function with true compassion. This is how we can live our daily lives when we are able to function in this clarified state of mind.

What I ask is for everyone to first give rise to this Bodhisattva vow. If we live in this vow, supported by this zazen, having this vow allows us to know which way our life is going. Having this vow decreases our delusions and our confusions. We know how to respond to each and every experience and occasion because of this vow. To be able to live in this vow gives our life clarity and purpose. There is no need at all to be without joy and without purpose when we have this vow clearly established. If we can live in this vow, with compassion clearly established and living through us, then we will be able to bring compassion to all of the people we encounter, to all of those many billions on this whole earth and those billions who are suffering as well. We will be able to bring them also the opportunity to realize this Bodhisattva vow. For that to be what we can do, in the twenty-first century, is the truth that will bring everyone to this place of love and harmony and compassion. That is my hope for that time.

All of us need to be able to realize that we are one in society and that each and every one of us has this same mind of deep compassion--that every single one of these many billions of people on earth also shares and is endowed with this mind of pure compassion. If we can know this and can believe in that pure mind of compassion of all these billions of people, then without fail in the twenty-first century there will be the true religion for all people. If we can all trust and believe in that mind in each other, then we will truly be able to find a world of peace. This is my greatest hope for the century to come.